



The U.S. Launch of The Lancet's Series on Maternal and Child Undernutrition

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Edited Transcript-
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I feel that with this exposé that has been given to us this morning, there's really very little for us to add except to applaud the work that has been done and to reflect on what the responsibilities and the implications are for all of us in the development community. Less than two years ago, the Bank released a seminal report on repositioning nutrition as central to development. This report had tremendous impact inside the Bank on the way in which we redefined our work in this particular area. But it also a tremendous impact on the way in which we work with our client countries and therefore the way in which we collaborated with other development partners.

It is clear that malnutrition, and indeed nutrition as a whole, is an economy imperative. It is an economic imperative because, as we have just heard, the direct losses in productivity from poor physical status that result from undernutrition and malnutrition. These indirect losses from poor cognitive function and deficits in schooling that also result from malnutrition and undernutrition. And losses owing to increasing health costs and therefore catastrophic implications and driving people into poverty because of the increases in health costs.

Addressing undernutrition and malnutrition is a poverty reduction strategy. That is our point of view. It is also very, very clear from the exposé that we have just received, that the dual relationship between nutrition and incomes is not as widely understood as we otherwise thought. Higher incomes do improve nutrition, but only slowly. And it is very, very clear from the exposé that we have been given and the series that has been launched today, that direct investments in nutrition have the potential to improve nutrition outcomes much faster than economy growth alone can. That is very, very clear. And it is because of this that we must ensure that improving nutrition, that we know increases economic growth, must become a pivotal component of our development strategy and development partners.

Bigger and healthier bodies lead to higher physical productivity. Well-nourished children are more intelligent. They are better learners in school. They are more productive as adults, and a well-nourished population spends less on health care. The economic benefits from improving nutrition are substantial: we have learned historically through research and as evidenced by the series that for individuals, they average at least 10 percent of lifetime earnings and for



economies they can make a difference of two to three percent of the gross domestic product. This is substantial.

But the implications of this for us as a development committee and for us in the Bank is not only that we must invest in nutrition, but we must be more strategic in the way that we invest in nutrition. We must not only integrate it into the other areas of investment, we must not only build capacity in countries to address this issue in a much more effective manner, we must not only scale up knowledge, whether it be in research or in tools, in interventions that work, and as well as monitoring what works and scaling it up. But we must also ensure that it becomes pivotal to the other areas that are indicated by a lack of good security, such as the areas in trade and such as the areas in climate change that are currently very, very pivotal to development.

The undernutrition agenda, therefore, is increasing recognition of the importance, not only of addressing undernutrition and malnutrition, but the challenges such as those of obesity and related non-communicable diseases. There is a strong interest within the Bank to engage more activity with you as global partners and with our client countries in these areas in a multi-sector manner and in an integrated manner, making sure that we link research, social protection issues, gender, early childhood development, investments, environment and climate change investments with investments in nutrition. And we do agree with the conclusions that have been reached in the series: that they are huge implications for the architecture of the international nutrition system, and that these implications must be addressed effectively by all of us.

We must make up a more concerted effort to ensure that all the international organizations, whether they be academies, societies, private sector, or institutions that are currently fragmented and therefore are leading to a dysfunctional agenda in this area, come together and ensure that we establish a new global governance structure that can provide greater accountability and participation of all societies in order to ensure not only that we reach MDG One, but also that we also attain MDG Four and Five. But to some extent, we'll have to invest tremendously in MDG Two as well and, of course, there will be some benefits for MDG Six. So as the World Bank, we would like to associate ourselves with the recommendations that have been made by this group. We would like to commit to ensuring that we implement these recommendations and we would like to commit also to increase investments and collaboration and harmonization with you and the rest of the global community in this critical area. Thank you.